

The CRIMSON STAIN MYSTERY

Novelized by ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE
From the Consolidated Motion Picture Triumph

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Synopsis.

HAROLD STANLEY, reporter for a New York daily, owned by his father, is in love with Florence Montrose, daughter of Dr. Montrose, who has spent his life perfecting a machine to rejuvenate humanity. Stanley has been working on the mysterious murder of fourteen wealthy New Yorkers, each strangled by a being of supernatural power. The first view of the murderer is obtained by Florence Montrose, when Stanley's father is made the victim of the fifteenth Crimson Stain murder in her home. In an attempt to put Stanley out of the way because he has raised a hue and cry over his father's death, Pierre La Rue, the lawyer, runs into Florence and discovers that she recognizes him. La Rue's man Tanner kidnaps Florence. Stanley runs the flying auto down only to find that the girl has been put into a hypnotic trance and can tell nothing.

CHAPTER THREE.

The Broken Spell.

AS THE two men bent over the trance-bound girl—as Felix and Parrish listened from beyond the portières—Florence's wide eyes slowly closed. Her tense body relaxed its rigid pose. She sank back, a formless inert and lifeless little form, on the couch.

"She is dead!" gasped Harold Stanley in horror.

Parrish and Felix exchanged another glance fraught with strange meaning. The detective turned on his heel and silently quitted the house. Felix stole to his own quarters.

Dr. Montrose staggered rather than walked to the wall and tore from it a tiny Venetian mirror. He held this unsteadily just above Florence's white lips. As he glanced at the mirror again, he sighed in utter relief. The smooth surface of the glass was blurred over a little.

"It is her breath!" he exclaimed. "She is alive! She has merely sunk into the secondary stage of the hypnotic trance. She may lie like this weeks. She can never be aroused from it except by the man or woman who mesmerized her."

There was little enough hope in his tone. Stanley promised to call up every few hours to inquire for the patient. Then, saying good-by, he returned to his car and ordered the chauffeur to drive him back to Robert Clayton's studio.

There he found Clayton stretched out on the floor; his head in Vanya Tosca's lap. The model was leaning anxiously above him, bending down to kiss his temple. As Harold entered the studio, she looked up, eagerly.

"He is coming back to his senses," she said in pathetic gladness. "See! His eyes are opening and he is breathing regularly again."

"How did this happen?" demanded Stanley, glancing from her absolutely innocent face to that of the slowly recovering artist.

"I was waiting here for him," explained Vanya, "after you rushed out so excitedly. All at once I heard a groan. It came from behind the divan. I pushed the divan aside. Mr. Clayton lay there, gagged and bound."

The injured man rose on one elbow and blinked dazedly around him.

"What happened?" he asked, his voice unsteady, his eyes dull. "Did someone put me out? I—Oh, hello, Vanya!" he broke off. "What's up? How do you happen to be here?"

Harold said nothing. He scented mystery, although he no longer connected Vanya with it. After making certain that Clayton was none the wiser to his fair volunteer nurse and went downtown to the office.

"All this is mixed up, in some way, with the Crimson Stain," he mused, as he reviewed the afternoon's strange events. "I'm sure of that. But—oh, it doesn't make sense! I have the whole tangle in my hands, with no way of finding either end of it."

The next day saw no change in Florence Montrose's condition. Still she lay as one dead; the faint blur on the mirror alone showing that she breathed. Dr. Montrose quitted her bedside only once. That was when Harold Stanley telephoned to him to learn if she were better.

Stanley, hearing of her continued unconsciousness, announced that he was coming at once to the Montrose house to see her and to talk over a new plan of attack on the Crimson Stain. The doctor assented, without interest, and returned to his daughter's bedside.

For nearly an hour he sat thus, his eyes on Florence's lifeless face; his entire will power concentrated in an effort to overcome the force that held her, and to bring her back to her senses.

At last his tired gaze lifted. He glanced to look at a long mirror directly in front of him. In this mirror he saw that the door behind him was slowly opening. Moveless, astonished, he sat and watched.

Gradually, through the widening aperture, Pierre La Rue slipped into the room, and stood, just within the threshold, looking across with a mocking grin at Florence. Hearing that she was dead, he had stolen hither, in alarm, to verify or disprove the news.

Under the spell of La Rue's gaze, the girl slowly rose to a sitting posture, and her dark eyes opened wide. But her eyes were still those of a sleep-walker.

With a snarl like a fighting dog's, Dr. Montrose sprang to his feet and whirled about to confront La Rue. The latter, not in the least minded



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to confront the doctor in this mood, darted back across the threshold, drawing shut the door behind him.

Montrose, still swept by the flame of anger, snatched up a huge brass jardiniere from a bedside table and hurled it with all his might after the escaping La Rue.

The heavy missile whizzed through the air toward its mark. But La Rue had been an instant too quick for his clumsy assailant. The jardiniere crashed loudly against the newly-closed door, shattering one of the thick panels and caroming noisily to the floor.

The shock did for Florence what all the medical skill on earth could not have done. La Rue's presence had partly aroused her. La Rue's sudden panicky flight had shaken the hypnotist's mind for a moment loose from its hold on the girl. The fearful racket of the jardiniere's impact against the door had completed the work of breaking the spell.

Florence came to herself, with a little start of amazement, and stared around in wonder to find herself in bed. The last thing she remembered was looking into Pierre La Rue's eyes at the studio the day before. As in the case of most persons freed from hypnotic sleep, she felt none the worse for her experience. She was, apparently, in her usual perfect health again.

Harold Stanley, reaching the house, had been ushered into a reception room by Felix. As the servant was about to take his card up to Dr. Montrose, a crash resounded from an upper floor. Harold, his nerves taut and tingling, bounded up the wide staircase in the direction of the sound; just as Pierre La Rue glided, unseen, down the servants' staircase at the rear.

Thus it was that Dr. Montrose, striding toward the door of the bedroom, saw, through the smashed panel, Stanley hurrying down the hallway toward him. Instantly, he realized that his secret was in danger. And anger gave way to pitiful craftiness. Opening the broken door and greeting the newcomer, he said, hastily:

"Sometimes a shock will arouse a hypnotized sleeper. I threw a jardiniere at the wall, hoping to wake Florence that way. My aim was bad and it struck the door. I—"

"Dad," called a perplexed young voice behind him, "what in the world is the matter—and what am I doing up here? I want to Robert's studio to—"

A cry of dumfounded joy from both of them interrupted her. She had sprung out of bed and had wrapped a lace negligee about her. Thus clad, she was advancing toward them.

"You are awake again!" cried Harold in delight. "You are awake!"

"Why, of course, I'm awake, you silly boy," she answered, laughing. "Why shouldn't I be awake, in broad daylight? But how I happened to be in here!"

"You have been ill, dear," evaded her father.

"Ill," she repeated. "Why, I feel perfectly well. What nonsense! I—"

"No," quietly contradicted Harold, ignoring the look of appeal that the doctor flashed at him. "You have been hypnotized. You were just now awakened by me."

"You are right," she broke in, a flood of memory returning to her. "Yes, that was it. I remember. I must have been hypnotized. I remember it all. And I've read about such things, too. But I never believed them. I was hypnotized. He looked deep down through my eyes into my very soul. And then I seemed to be going to sleep. He—"

"I—I don't know," he had seen him only once before. A red glow, just like a ball of fire, flamed up into his eyes, and—

"The Crimson Stain!" cried Harold. "The Crimson Stain! Tell us about him! You must try to remember! You must!"

"I couldn't forget a single detail of it if I tried," she answered, shuddering. "I went to Bob Clayton's studio for my first sitting. Bob wasn't there. But this man was. I cried out, but he caught me by the shoulders and looked down into my eyes. The next thing I knew you were coming down the hall toward this room, just now."

"You say you'd seen him once before," Harold reminded her. "When and where?"

She hesitated a second; then, to her

astonishment, she found she could speak of the subject, upon which hitherto La Rue's power had held her dumb.

"I saw him the night your father died," she answered. "It was he who killed him. I came into the dining-room just ahead of you and Bob. This man was strangling your father. He looked at me—his eyes were flaring red—and he vanished through the curtains. He—"

"But," excitedly demanded Harold, "you never told us! Why not?"

"I—I tried to," she faltered. "Oh, so hard I tried to! But there seemed a seal on my lips. I—"

"Please describe the man as closely as you can," Harold went on, turning to the girl. "We want every detail."

"No, not!" protested the doctor. "Not now. She is too weak—too exhausted by the trance—to be allowed to talk any longer."

"Why, Dad!" laughed Florence. "I'm nothing of the sort. And I'll gladly describe him. Besides, it may save other people from becoming Crimson Stain victims. Or, perhaps, now that you are so close on his trail, he may be found."

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"Since last night," supplemented Harold.

"Last night!" cried Florence and her father.

"Tell us," insisted Florence, while her father stared in dumb misery at the speaker.

"You remember the tumbledown old Lent house, just above the Bronx?" went on Stanley. "The haunted house we used to call it. Florence, you and I went there on a picnic once when we were kids. And you've both heard the rumors, of course, that Hiram Lent kept big sums of money there, because he didn't trust banks."

"He has lived there alone, ever since I can remember. Well, just before midnight, last evening, he was found lying dead across his doorstep. Some people in an automobile lost their way back to town and they stopped at this shanty to ask the route. They found him there, dead. His whole house had been ransacked. And—"

"Horrible!" groaned Dr. Montrose, his own throat sandaled with terror.

"I'm going there this afternoon," continued Harold, "and look the ground over, in person."

"Take me with you!" was Florence's unexpected plea.

Her father broke out in a fierce refusal.

"I'll try to stop here on my way, if I can make time to," Harold told her when he rose to go. "And then, if the doctor will let you, we'll run down there together."

On the walk leading through the grounds to the street Stanley was surprised to meet Vanya Tosca coming toward the house. At the sight of her she flushed with genuine embarrassment. Having fared to Montrose for a new dress, she was not over-pleased to be recognized.

"I—I come to see if Miss Montrose is better," she faltered, as she took Stanley's hand. "I heard you telling Mr. Clayton she was ill."

It was a flimsy excuse, but it roused no suspicion in Harold's abstracted mind. Releasing her hand, he said:

"She is very much better. If you're going back to town, can I give you a lift in my car?"

Vanya hesitated. Then her quick eye noted that Florence was watching them in genuine perplexity from the window of her room. Spitefully glad to sting the girl with jealousy, Vanya gushingly accepted the invitation. Florence, with a queer little tug at her heartstrings, saw them get into the car and drive off together.

"Is there anything new in that paper is wagging?" asked Vanya idly, as she and Stanley neared the city.

"Yes," replied Harold, with some vehemence. "There is a lot that's new. That's why I'm hurrying back to the office."

And he told her what he had learned from Florence concerning the Crimson Stain. Vanya listened with polite interest, then changed the subject; and presently left the car on the pretext of having a call to pay in Bedford Park.

Two minutes later she was in a drug store telephone booth. An hour later she and Tanner and one or two others were closeted with Pierre La Rue in

the big room at the back of Tanner's upper East Side apartment. Pierre was speaking.

"This news changes everything," he was saying. "And we must meet it the only way it can be met. But it seems Florence Montrose can describe me too well, and she's likely to point me out to the first policeman, if ever she happens to meet me on the street. What's worse, she's likely to see me when I go to Montrose for the drug. And then everything will go to smash. We must—lose her."

"The finger bracelet!" asked Vanya unconcernedly.

"No," refused Pierre. "That's too risky, for they'll be watching her. You say she wants Stanley to take her to the Lent house this afternoon? We'll save him the trouble. Take her there yourself, Tanner. You and Phelps. I'll give you your instructions later. Take her there, to her there, and have with you one of the cute little torpedoes I taught you how to make."

"More bomb work!" spluttered Tanner, quite without enthusiasm.

"More bomb work," assented La Rue. "It sweeps as clean as a new broom. It doesn't even leave trace for people to get nosy about, if it's strong enough. And ours are strong enough. It'll take her out of our way. And I'll take the Lent house out of her way. The police are studying that house too carefully today. I don't like it. We did a fairly clean job. But we were there for an hour or more. And we may have left traces that they'll blunder onto. Even the cleverest man is apt to."

"I don't like the job," grumbled Tanner. "Why don't you try the hypnotism again?"

"Too unsafe. You saw how it worked out this time. Hypnotism is like chemistry. There is always an 'unknown' factor in it. The best chemist is always liable to be blown sky-high with his own familiar chemicals. And the best hypnotist—myself, if you like—is apt to lose his hold over his subject. Just as I've done today. Now, there's nothing subtle or doubtful about the right sort of a bomb."

"I don't like it," reiterated Tanner sulky.

Pierre stepped a little closer to him. There was no change in the expression of La Rue's masklike face. But the strange crimson light began to flame in his eyes. Tanner shrank back; all the bluster gone from him.

"Oh, I'll do it, all right!" he muttered. "But how'll we get her there?"

"I told you," said La Rue, pleasantly. "That I'd give you your instructions later."

"We'll try to make up today," said he, "for our bundle of yesterday at Clayton's studio. I want you to get Stanley there at 2 o'clock this afternoon. I won't be there at quarter past. I won't trust any outsiders to help us out today. You say Clayton and he always have a highball or a thimbleful of cordial when Stanley comes to the studio. If you're good at all you ought to be able to put enough of our slinger in their drinks to have them both safe asleep by the time I get there. The rest will be so simple that even a bonehead like Tanner could do it."

"But Mr. Stanley won't be able to be at the studio this afternoon," objected Vanya. "He's going up to the Lent house and—"

"Perhaps I spoke so indistinctly that you didn't understand me," purred La Rue. "I said: 'Get Stanley there.'"

Vanya subsided, with a murmur.

As Harold Stanley was about to leave the office at one-thirty, to go uptown in his gray roadster, Vanya Rosca summoned him to the telephone.

"I've just come from Bob Clayton's studio," she said, worriedly, "and I don't at all like the way he looks after his accident of yesterday. Won't you please stop in there for five minutes on your way uptown? Don't say I asked you to. Just tell him you dropped in for a drink and a cigar with him. And then look him over carefully, without his suspecting. I think he needs a doctor. If you tell him so he may send for one. He won't do it for me."

When Stanley strolled into the studio a little later, Vanya was posing for the "Dellah" picture and Clayton was busy at his easel. Except for a patch of plaster on the forehead, Harold could not see that the

artist looked any the worse for his mishap.

"Hello!" Clayton bade his model. Then going across to meet Harold, he exclaimed:

"It's awfully decent of you to drop down on us like this, when you're so busy. Have a drink."

"Wait!" called Vanya, running into the adjoining kitchenette. "I'll get the highballs for you. Men are so awkward."

A minute later she came back bearing a tray containing three glasses, a siphon and a little bowl of cracked ice.

"Men are awkward, eh?" scoffed Clayton. "How about women? You've actually poured the Scotch into the glasses instead of bringing us the bottle."

"I did it," she defended herself, "because you both would take too much if I left you pour it yourselves."

"Who's getting the 'misses' and children's size drink?" he asked, pointing to one glass which had barely a spoonful of whisky in it.

"That's mine," she announced. "I hate the smelly, stinging stuff, so I take as little as possible. Say when."

The glasses were charged, and Clayton raised his to his lips. Stanley reached for the glass Vanya had filled for him, and lifted it abruptly.

Generations of men have wondered why a seemingly useless trio of buttons are seen on each sleeve of a coat.

One of them caught on the edge of the table as he lifted his arm to drink. The jerk knocked the glass out of his hand, and it smashed on the floor, cascading his boots with Scotch and carbonic.

"Rottenly careless of me!" he apologized, "I'm sorry."

"Never mind," consoled Vanya. "I'll get you another drink."

"No, thanks," he said, "I must run on. I just dropped in to say 'hello.' Bob, you're looking better than I expected. Good-by."

He went out; just as Robert Clayton slumped down into an armchair in a drugged sleep.

A little earlier, Florence Montrose received a note, brought to her by a messenger, from her father, who was waiting at the door. She recognized Harold Stanley's strong handwriting, and opening the envelope, she read:

"I am in terrible trouble, here at the old Lent house. I can't explain in this note. But, for the sake of all our old time friendship I beg you to help me by coming here at once. The bearer of this note, can be trusted. He will bring you to me, in his car. H. S."

Impulsively, the girl obeyed the impelling summons from her old play-fellow. Throwing the note hurriedly into the bosom of her dress, she ran upstairs for her hat and gloves. She then fell from her resting place as she ran, and it lay (unnoticed by the excited girl) on the floorway of the lower hall.

And there, five minutes later, Harold Stanley found it.

Stanley, reaching the Montrose home, to take Florence with him to the Lent house, stood waiting in the hall, while a servant went upstairs to look for her. There his eye fell idly on the twisted sheet of paper.

"The Lent house!" he shouted to his chauffeur. "Break every speed law in the statute books, and get me there!"

Florence meantime had made good time in the strange car that had come for her. Once, as they neared the Bronx, she glanced to look back, and saw in the distance a gray roadster careening along in a cloud of its own dust at break-neck pace. But she was too much troubled as to Harold Stanley's fate to give the whirling gray car a second thought.

Presently her automobile stopped, in front of the dilapidated Lent house. She jumped out, hurried up the weed-grown walk and entered the hovel, the chauffeur at her heels.

Just inside the door she was confronted by a man she had never before seen. In his hands he held several lengths of tough silken cord. As he eyed her, she saw that the cord seized her from behind and strove to force a gag into her mouth, while Tanner, striding forward, caught both her hands and began to wind one of the cords around her wrists.

The girl struggled furiously in the grasp of the cords. A second later she heard some one dash into the house, whirlwind fashion. And she had a glimpse of Harold Stanley as the latter flung himself upon Tanner.

The chauffeur, loosing his hold on Florence, advanced toward the battling men and put his hand to his pistol pocket. Florence, scarce knowing what she did, snatched up an earthen jar from the floor beside her and brought it down with all her sinuous young strength upon the chauffeur's head.

He fell like a dead man under the blow. Tanner, beneath the impetus of Stanley's fist, sprawled alongside his confederate less than a second later.

"Come!" said Stanley, throwing a protecting arm around Florence and drawing her out of the house with him. "Let's get away from this while the 'getting' is still good. There may be a dozen more of those chaps around here."

He helped her into the car, which sped off with them from the perilous vicinity, not a second too soon.

Tanner, at the same time, was scrambling, panic-stricken, to his feet, and, without a backward look at his unconscious comrade, bolted out of the hut's back door and plunged at full speed through the tangle of briars that lay behind it.

As he ran, an explosion sent him tumbling to earth again, with a flying storm of debris pelting him as he fell.

Looking back at sound of the detonation, Harold saw the Lent house arise bodily in air, then amid a sheet of yellow flame, crumble into nothingness.

(TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

RED MEN'S CONVENTION HELPS BOOST WILDWOOD

Visitors Flock to Resort for Pageant and for Fishing.

Wildwood, N. J., Sept. 16.—This week's activities centered around the national convention of the Improved Order of Red Men, when delegates representing forty-five States of the Union were in attendance, many for the first time seeing the ocean, as well as this popular resort.

The greatest event of the week was the great street pageant on Wednesday afternoon, when thousands of Red Men from the tribes of Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey took part in the contest for the prizes offered by the order and city officials.

Arrivals have poured into the resort without ceasing all week. The pleasant weather has added to the list many whose usual trips have been made later in the month. Fishing, crabbing, bathing and yachting by moonlight are still popular.

There never were so many visitors at this resort and its sister resorts, at a corresponding period, as there have been in the past week or so. They are still coming in large numbers.

On Friday, Director Walter Pfeiffer and his orchestra closed the season at the Wildwood Casino Auditorium. It has been the best musical season ever given in Wildwood, and the leader was presented with a purse of gold by the leading citizens of Wildwood.

A large number of persons are advocating that after the completion of the sewage plant (the city is erecting an up-to-date garbage incinerating plant for the resort).

Another question that is being talked about is the moving of the old boardwalk along the Holly Beach section of the resort nearer to the water's edge, and on a line with the new Wildwood wooden way.

Capitalists are also investigating as well as taking up the matter of erecting a half-million-dollar hotel.

CHALMERS DEALERS PLAN CELEBRATION

"Open House" to Be Held by All Distributors on September 30.

A nation-wide birthday celebration in which more than 1,500 Chalmers distributors and dealers will act as hosts, is announced for September 30. F. B. Willis, sales manager of the Chalmers Motor Company.

The occasion for the monster celebration is the first anniversary of the announcement of the 1916 R. P. M. Chalmers Six-30. Just a year ago, Chief Engineer Hinkley turned over the thoroughly tested model car to the Chalmers manufacturing department. Since that time 2,000 Chalmers Six-30s have been produced and are now giving perfect satisfaction in the hands of owners. The Chalmers Six-30 has achieved the enviable record of 92.1 per cent perfect service in its year of life.

"We thought it fitting that our dealers should recognize in some way the first birthday of the most famous Chalmers car ever built," says Mr. Willis. "Our sales promotion department hit upon the scheme of a general reception at the establishment of all Chalmers dealers."

In addition to the visiting motorists in the larger cities will have their first opportunity to inspect the latest Chalmers closed car models which have just been announced. The new closed models, including the touring sedan, limousine, town car, and cabriolet, are all fitted to the standard 3,000 R. P. M. chassis and are rated among the smartest models making their appearance this year.

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For the coming season.

STUDEBAKER PUTS OUT BIG NUMBER OF CARS

Seventy Thousand Seven-Passenger Machines Produced in 14 Months.

During the past fourteen months, according to information just made known, the Studebaker corporation led the automobile industry in the production and sale of seven-passenger cars. In that period Studebaker seven-passenger automobiles were sold in greater numbers than any other make of seven-passenger motor cars placed in the hands of owners during the same time. It is also a record in the history of the automobile industry.

In addition to the seven-passenger cars there has also been a large increase in the output of roadsters and closed cars. In fact, in all the models built by the Studebaker corporation.

The Studebaker business has shown a 100 per cent increase during the past year, and production at present is at the rate of 100,000 cars annually. This will show a gain of 60 per cent over the output of last year, which up to that time set a new record for Studebaker. Two years ago the production was 37,000 Studebakers for the year. The dealer organization has grown from 2,000 to more than 4,500 dealers.

The Studebaker corporation is now represented in nearly every city and town in the country.

CHEVROLET PLANS NEW SERVICE STATION HERE

Manager Harry Mundy, of the local Chevrolet branch, had as his visitor last week Mr. H. B. Leahy, sales manager of the New York branch of the Chevrolet Motor Company. While here Mr. Leahy worked with Mr. Mundy on arrangements for the site of a new service station, to be built with the idea of giving Chevrolet owners absolutely up-to-the-minute service.

With the reputation the local Chevrolet branch already has for giving service Chevrolet owners will look forward to the completion of this new station with the expectation of getting service far above the ordinary level.

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